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USVI Animal Shelters at Risk as Government Fails to Execute Contracts and Release Funds

The St. Croix Animal Welfare Center and other rescues across the territory face closure due to delayed government funding. Despite written confirmation of grants, the shelters have yet to receive funds, leaving vital animal welfare services in jeopardy.

Community Center / **Published On March 03, 2025 11:08 AM /**

Staff Consortium **March 03, 2025**

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Animal welfare organizations across the U.S. Virgin Islands are facing an uncertain future due to the government's failure to execute contracts and release critical funding, according to a release from the St. Croix Animal Welfare Center (SCAWC) issued today.

The welfare center said that without the necessary financial support, shelters across the territory will continue to struggle to maintain operations and provide essential services for the growing

number of abandoned and stray animals.

SCAWC, St. Thomas Humane Society, Animal Care Center of St. John, Ruff Start, and REAL Cruzan Cats have yet to receive their anticipated government funding, putting them at risk of closing their doors, according to the release. SCAWC said that its contract with the USVI Government expired on September 30, 2024, and despite repeated efforts to renew the agreement, requests were met with silence.

Following intense advocacy from both local and national supporters, the USVI Government announced on October 22, 2024, that it would award SCAWC with a \$175,000 grant for general operations and a \$50,000 grant for a spay/neuter program, the release states. However, despite receiving written confirmation from the government that the contracts were signed, the funds never arrived.

The first installment of SCAWC's operational grant was due on December 1, 2024, but was never received. Similarly, the first \$25,000 payment for the spay/neuter program was due on January 1, 2025, but those funds were also never disbursed, according to the release.

After months of unanswered emails and voicemails, SCAWC Executive Director, LaToya Petty, visited the Department of Agriculture in person on February 24, 2025. It was only then that she learned that her primary contact at the department was no longer in place, and SCAWC's contracts had never been executed, SCAWC said.

Immediately, Petty reached out to other animal rescue organizations in the territory, including the St. Thomas Humane Society, Animal Care Center of St. John, Ruff Start, and REAL Cruzan Cats, to see if any had received funding. None of them had executed contracts or received government support.

On Friday, February 28, 2025, Petty and SCAWC Director of Public Relations and Marketing, Becca Hughson, met with USVI Administrator Samuel Sanes. Sanes expressed shock upon learning that the territory's animal rescues had not received their contracts or funding and assured them that he would work to rectify the situation, according to the release.

On March 1, 2025, Sanes followed up with Ms. Petty and Ms. Hughson, stating that he had reached out to V.I. Dept. of Finance Commissioner Kevin McCurdy, but had not yet received a response. Sanes assured them that he would meet with McCurdy in person on March 5, 2025, on St. Thomas to discuss the matter and push for the execution of the contracts.

Meanwhile, the second payment toward SCAWC's general operations grant, due on March 1, 2025, remains unpaid. Despite ongoing outreach and pressure, there has been no sign of resolution from the government, according to the release. "Without immediate action, the territory's animal rescues face the grim possibility of shutting down, leaving countless animals without shelter and vital services," stated SCAWC.

With the future of animal welfare in the USVI hanging in the balance, shelters are seeking public support. Those wishing to help can donate to the following organizations:

- St. Croix Animal Welfare Center: stcroixawc.org/donate

- St. Thomas Humane Society: humanesocietystthomas.org
- Animal Care Center of St. John: stjohnanimalcarecenter.com/donate
- Ruff Start: ruffstartstx.org/donate
- REAL Cruzan Cats: realcruzancats.org

Animal welfare advocates continue to push for urgent action, calling on government officials to honor their commitments and provide the funding needed to keep shelters operational.

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